

Georgia State University ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Art and Design Theses

Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design

5-10-2019

Dignity

Carla Powell

Carla Powell

Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses

Recommended Citation

Powell, Carla and Powell, Carla, "Dignity." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2019.
https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses/252

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art and Design Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

DIGNITY

by

CARLA POWELL

Under the Direction of Jess Jones

ABSTRACT

Dignity is a body of work examining and celebrating the efforts of women who are in challenging circumstances to compel a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities. Using the most basic of tools, most notably the hand, women can individually change their outcome, as well as that of their families and their communities. The artwork explores these ideas and focuses on the visual processes and products that women's hands perform and create around the world.

INDEX WORDS: Dignity, Poverty, Women, Education, Skills, Empowerment, Disadvantage, Cultural norms, Hardship, Community, Families, Women's rights.

DIGNITY

by

CARLA POWELL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Art (MFA) Textiles

in the College of Arts

Georgia State University

2019

Copyright by
Carla Ferreira Powell
2019

DIGNITY

by

CARLA POWELL

Committee Chair: Jess Jones

Committee: Kimberly Cleveland

Ruth Stanford

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Academic Assistance

College of Arts

Georgia State University

May 2019

DEDICATION

The boundless curiosity and exploration which exists in our home along with the complete support from my family for my love and commitment to the textile arts has allowed me the opportunity to follow my dreams. My wholehearted gratitude and all my love to my husband Ed and my darling sons Nick and Andrew.

I could not have done it without you.

Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Jess Jones, Kimberly Cleveland, Ruth Stanford and all the faculty and fellow graduate colleagues at Georgia State University who have supported, guided, questioned and encouraged my work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
LIST OF FIGURES	VIII
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 My Story	3
1.2 A Common Thread.....	3
1.3 Thesis Statement.....	6
2 TEXTILES	6
2.1 Impact of Textiles in Daily Lives	6
2.2 Valuing the Hand Made.....	7
3 DIGNITY THROUGH MAKING	9
3.1 Dignity	11
3.2 Cultural Perspectives	12
3.3 Empathy	14
3.4 Empowerment.....	17
3.5 Activism.....	19
3.6 Outcomes.....	20
4 ARTWORKS	21
5 CONCLUSION	26
REFERENCES.....	27

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Empowered Autonomy, 2019.....	2
Figure 2 Sri Aari Creatives: Embroidery, Chennai, India, 2017 Artist's Private Collection	5
Figure 3 Sri Aari Creatives: Women, Chennai, India, 2017 Artist's Private Collection.....	5
Figure 4. The Handmade: Sewing (1).....	8
Figure 5 Justice is Woven with Golden Thread, 2019	10
Figure 6 Jasleen Kaur - Lord Robert Napier.....	14
Figure 7 Unacknowledged, 2018	16
Figure 8 Mahalaxmi, Nepal; Artist's Private Collection.....	18
Figure 9 Burden, 2017	22
Figure 10 Perseverance, 2019	24
Figure 11 Determination, 2019	25

1 INTRODUCTION

I create artworks using textiles. My art incorporates hand and machine sewing which serves to celebrate and highlight the dignity of the laborious handwork created by disproportionately poor women who struggle against cultural norms and strive to elevate themselves, their families and their communities. I draw attention to skills typically demeaned as “women’s work” which prove to be economically fruitful, empowering women to earn an income and advance themselves socioeconomically.

I have worked directly with economically and socially repressed women both locally in the United States and abroad in Nepal, training them in developing sewing skills and production skills necessary to enable the women to realize their hopes and potential. My art highlights the strength and the quiet dignity of these women, while being influenced by and celebrating their successes, struggles, and accomplishments.



Figure 1 Empowered Autonomy, 2019

Empowered Autonomy is a large-scale artwork (90" x 60") and the associated remnants placed on the floor. Both the wall art and the associated floor remnants are textiles which I collected while working with women in Nepal. In the upper left-hand side of the large image a hand is depicted sewing while the remaining image is an exuberant collection of textiles emerging from the plain of the surface. I hand sewed each remnant onto the artwork which took several weeks and many hours to complete. *Empowered Autonomy* came directly from my experience working directly with Nepalese women and highlights both the effort and the accomplishments women realize from their skills.

1.1 My Story

I am a textile artist. I use fabrics and various fiber mediums and materials to express my empathy for those who use this material for economic sustenance.

Textiles are defined as cloth and are created from a variety of fibers, including wool, silk, cotton, flax, jute and synthetic materials which are woven into a fabric with diverse applications. My desire to use and work with fibers originates from an extensive exposure to textiles, both as an artform and as a craft. From a very young age I was taught sewing, embroidery, crochet and knitting, and I incorporate many textiles and textile skills into my artwork. I embrace and incorporate craft heritage and hand stitching traditions as an enabler of women's socioeconomic self-empowerment, while also celebrating the knowledge of the various techniques.

1.2 A Common Thread

Textiles link us beyond culture, place, religious affiliation, language and the customs that define us. From my foreign (non-American) upbringing, living and traveling in Africa, South America, North America, Europe, India and Nepal, I have come to see that textiles have a similitude and those of us involved with textiles speak a common language.

In 2017, as result of my interest and experience empowering women through education and skill training in the textile arts, I was invited to Kathmandu, Nepal, to work with ACP (Association for Craft Producers) one of the oldest and largest handicrafts organizations in

Nepal. ACP is a not for profit, fair trade organization that provides design, marketing, management, and technical services to low-income and predominantly female craft producers. ACP's mission is to promote the work of 1,200 women assuring that they receive fair wages and generous benefits.¹

In Nepal I worked side by side with a block printer, admiring, sharing, exchanging, laughing and connecting and neither of us speaking the other's language. In India, I sat in a room along with 10 other women learning aari embroidery without the ability to communicate with one another verbally but communicating our shared struggles and successes and the sheer joy of embroidering beautiful designs on fabric through the language of textiles. Through these hands-on experiences I was able to leverage my interest and experiences to provide these women with insight in the broader market they were supplying.

¹ "ACP-Association for Craft Producers." n.d. Accessed October 31, 2018. http://acp.org.np/producers/tbl_products.



Figure 2 Sri Aari Creatives: Embroidery, Chennai, India, 2017 Artist's Private Collection



Figure 3 Sri Aari Creatives: Women, Chennai, India, 2017 Artist's Private Collection

1.3 Thesis Statement

My MFA body of work focuses on the dignity that making with textiles brings to the lives of women. Working with textiles allows women the opportunity to shape and take ownership of the means to uplift their children and families as well as their communities. My work explores the act of making, which is the moment women create their own dignity.

2 TEXTILES

I have learned that each and every piece of cloth embodies the spirit, skill, and personal history of an individual weaver. Weaving is a living art, an expression of culture, geography, and history. It ties together with an endless thread the emotional life of my people.²

Nilda Callañaupa Alvarez, Chinchero weaver, CTTC founder and director

2.1 Impact of Textiles in Daily Lives

From the moment we are born we are surrounded by textiles. Newborns are routinely swaddled in cloth. This deep personal attachment continues throughout our lives. A great deal of care and thought goes into the fabric of the swaddling cloth. It must be warm, it must be dry, and it must be soft.

² “Our History – Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco”, Accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.textilescusco.org/index.php/our-history/>

The industrial revolution significantly impacted the textile trade with the processes becoming mechanized.³ But everything we wear is still sewn together by people. They work in factories, but the only difference between the sewing machine in the factory and the one owned by an individual at home is that the factory machine has a faster engine. While industrialization enables efficiencies that reduce costs and standardize quality, there still exists the means of production at an individual scale. There exists a robust market interested in acquiring the hand made.

2.2 Valuing the Hand Made

As the world becomes more mechanized and computers and AI (artificial intelligence) equipment becomes more sophisticated, we are becoming further displaced from the processes of making.⁴ The skills necessary to “make” have a high degree of expertise and we owe it to ourselves to preserve this expertise in order to maintain our connection to the value of making.

If we believe that art and artistry have value, then just as the specific knowledge of an engineer, an architect or a lawyer is valued, so should the expertise of the artisan that weaves or sews or otherwise uses textiles in their processes.

³ Alli Farago, “The Textile Industry During the Industrial Revolution”, October 2017
<https://globaledge.msu.edu/blog/post/54483/the-textile-industry-during-the-industrial-revolution>

⁴ Glenn Adamson. *Fewer Better Things: The Hidden Wisdom of Objects*. Bloomsbury 2018.



Figure 4. The Handmade: Sewing (1)

In the series “The Handmade” my works showcase hands in the process of creating. These hands are specifically doing tasks involving textiles such as sewing, needlework, crochet, knitting, weaving or embroidering. The gold thread used to depict women’s hands in the process of making evokes both the value that the work brings, as well as the dignity gained from doing it. The stitching on the artwork is done on hand dyed and hand woven silk waste. These silks are the discarded ends of the silks that are hand woven on looms, many of which are housed in private individual houses. For these Indian and Nepalese households, weaving is the main source of income.

The individual strands of the silk are very fine and are akin to human hair in feel, texture, and weight. Silk has a long history of being perceived as the most valuable and luxurious

material. Using it to support the subjects in my art conveys the strength and dignity in the struggle for women's empowerment.

3 DIGNITY THROUGH MAKING

The current makers movement emphasizes and celebrates the art of making. The ability to make and the outcome of making engenders dignity in the lives of poor and disadvantaged women. Through making, women are empowered as they earn a living while at the same time being valued for their expertise.

As we go through life, we consume. Most of our consumption is from industrialized sources. However, some market outlets such as Ibu⁵, Crate & Barrel, and World Market actively seek and offer sales channels for boutique products created by independent makers in developing countries. These makers' products range from household standards such as tableware and bed linens, to one-off art pieces worthy of being showcased in homes and corporate offices. These mass market outlet channels enable makers all over the world to transform their talents, inspirations, and the materials they can access into a livelihood that would otherwise be denied to them. The challenge is to assure access to market without exploiting the maker. The fair-trade movement has provided visibility to support them. My art focuses on the act of making. It is a representation of the moment a subject's ideas, capabilities, and materials are transformed into a

⁵ "About – Welcome to the Ibu Movement", Accessed April 15, 2019, <https://ibumovement.com/pages/about-ibu>

marketable product and, in this transformation, women are transformed from powerless to empowered. This transformation engenders dignity.



Figure 5 Justice is Woven with Golden Thread, 2019

Three panels connected by golden threads comprise *Justice is Woven with Golden Thread*. Each panel consists of a collection of fabric scraps, some of which I collected in Nepal. Some fabrics have been hand dyed, some are commercially fabricated. All were originally used to create a product made for consumers. The fabric discards represent the skills and effort of the individual hands that worked with these remnants, while also alluding to the inconsequential status impoverished and unrepresented women face. The process towards gaining recognition respect and justice is arduous, but the resulting outcomes are golden both metaphorically and literally.

3.1 Dignity

The World Bank report on Poverty in 2000-2001 stated:

Poor people live without fundamental freedoms of action and choice that the better-off take for granted. They often lack adequate food and shelter, education and health, deprivations that keep them from leading the kind of life that everyone values. They also face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation, and natural disasters. And they are often exposed to ill treatment by institutions of the state and society and are powerless to influence key decisions affecting their lives.⁶

How do we establish dignity, and what impact does poverty have on dignity? Poverty deprives people of social justice. Women are equally entitled to opportunities, self-respect, and independence.

So why dignity? At the root of my choice of the word dignity is the sense of self-worth. Self-worth is connected to human worth, which establishes a set of personal individual rights possessed by all us by virtue of our shared humanity. I think that it's important to note that the word dignity has become a concept that is fundamental in our perception of how we should be valued and treated. In fact, the word "dignity" was included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10th, 1948. It reads: "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the **dignity** and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and

⁶ "Overview.Pdf." n.d. Accessed October 11, 2018.
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPOVERTY/Resources/WDR/overview.pdf>.

small.”⁷ The term dignity subsequently finds its way as the central value in the covenants of many international organizations. The Geneva Convention states “The human **dignity** of all individuals must be respected at all times.”⁸ The Helsinki Accords states “... the inherent **dignity** of the human person and are essential for his free and full development.”⁹ The African (Banjul) Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights states “Every individual shall have the right to the respect of the **dignity** inherent in a human being.”¹⁰ The European Union’s Charter of Fundamental Rights states, “Human **dignity** is inviolable. It must be respected and protected.”¹¹

3.2 Cultural Perspectives

A greater number of people live in cosmopolitan cities immersed in cosmopolitan societies and experiences. Influenced by international travel and immigration, we have become more familiar with people, customs, and cuisines of different countries and we embrace these experiences and insights. Access to a cosmopolitan experience brings about an ease with other cultures and customs.

Textiles have connected people and places for centuries. Today you will find Ikats on everything from clothing at Target to high-end designer labels. Kantha cloth is easily found everywhere from Tuesday Morning to TJ Maxx as homegoods and apparel. Kilim weavings are

⁷ Kurtas, Susan. n.d. “*Research Guides: UN Documentation: Human Rights: Introduction.*” Research guide. Accessed October 11, 2018. [//research.un.org/en/docs/humanrights/Introduction](http://research.un.org/en/docs/humanrights/Introduction).

⁸ “GENEVA CONVENTION.” n.d. Accessed October 11, 2018. http://archive.ppu.org.uk/learn/texts/doc_geneva_con.html.

⁹ “PUBLIC LAW 100-377—AUG. 1, 1988 102 STAT. 883”, Accessed 04-15-2019 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-102/pdf/STATUTE-102-Pg883.pdf>

¹⁰ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Article 5. <http://www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/>

¹¹ Andrea Sangiovanni. “*Humanity Without Dignity: Moral Equality, Respect, and Human Rights.*” (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 14

on cushions, upholstery, and carpets at Ikea and high-end furniture stores. “Ideas about belonging to more than one place, which in reality results in a sense of connection to everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, are pertinent to society today more than ever.”¹²

My personal history, being foreign born, affords me a perspective of many cultures and the uses of textiles within those cultures to represent their view of “us”. America, in some ways, represents a long pattern of migration and transformation as it continuously considers and absorbs the contributions of all the worlds cultures. To the American audience where my work is seen, it provides the viewer an opportunity to reflect on the origin of their textile possessions. It enables the viewer to consider where their textiles come from and how their consumption might empower some distant and unknown maker.

The cosmopolitan aspect to our societies means that our points of view integrate the perspective of different cultures. Artists engage with this dynamic hybridity to convey a point of view or elicit a dialogue. Textile artists have the added advantage of bringing specificity to their work and their artistic dialogue by incorporating culturally specific techniques. Ikats, kantha cloth, madras cloth, plaids all were once exotic foreign designs but are now commonplace.

It is noteworthy to point out that cultural influence is not one-sided. As a postgraduate student in 2010 at the Royal College of Art in London, Jasleen Kaur, in a letter she wrote to Lord Robert Napier, asking permission to wrap a turban around his head and to photograph this image “intended as a celebratory statement of the dialogue between two communities of different

¹² Jessica Hemmings, *Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 12

cultures, religions and languages.”¹³ She further states in her letter “With this intervention I will not be claiming to make a radical new statement, but simply to draw attention to a rich historical relationship and understanding between India and Britain.”¹⁴



Figure 6 Jasleen Kaur - Lord Robert Napier

3.3 Empathy

In a video presentation in 2013 Dr. Brené Brown, an American research professor in The Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston, describes empathy. She states that “Empathy fuels connection”¹⁵ because empathy is a trait which someone must feel WITH

¹³ Jessica Hemmings, *Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 18

¹⁴ Jessica Hemmings, *Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 18

¹⁵ Brené Brown on Empathy, The RSA, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

someone. To truly empathize, a person must be able to connect with the feeling or situation that another person is experiencing.

Empathy is a rare trait and very few people can empathize. It is often mistaken with sympathizing which Dr. Brown explains drives disconnection because of the inability to relate.

In the case of my work regarding women, support takes place through empathy by individuals who recognize and fundamentally understand the conditions of continued poverty and powerlessness in which women succeed through their efforts.

In his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, psychologist Dr. Daniel Goleman writes that, “the root of altruism lies in empathy, the ability to read emotions in others; lacking a sense of another’s need or despair, there is no caring.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, (Bantam Books, 2005), 12



Figure 7 Unacknowledged, 2018

In *Unacknowledged* I have incorporated my imagery of a woman sewing while sitting on the ground outside the front door of her home. The image is 41" x 60" and is printed on chiffon. The woman is partially obscured by golden brown silk waste threads, reminiscent of hair. The image is layered over a second fabric embellished with golden threads and embroidery. The chiffon image has been cut and layered with a different a second image also printed on chiffon of a landscape covered in trash. The woman rises from the struggles encumbered upon her by poverty, the trash filled landscape a symbol for her struggles.

3.4 Empowerment

Why should systems invest in giving women dominion over their destinies and ultimately their dignity? Michelle Nunn, president and CEO of CARE USA, published an article in Devex stating

visit rural Niger and meet women who pool their money in a lockbox, give each other loans, and share the profits made from interest. Repayment rates at their Village Savings and Loan Associations approach 100 percent. These savings groups have more than 15 million members,¹⁷ mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. Roughly 80 percent are women. They learn new skills, build businesses, and reinvest the earnings in their families. Yet few of these women qualify for bank accounts, credit, or loans because they don't have established credit histories, assets to leverage as collateral, or a male relative's permission. The structures disempower women. And women's burdens transcend economics; violence and abuse, deficient medical care, and entrenched norms keep women isolated and marginalized.¹⁸

Supporting women through education, skill training, and financially has far reaching positive outcomes. Empowering women advances and secures them and their communities. "The World Bank report shows that when there is a gender gap in legal rights, fewer women own their own businesses and experience greater income inequality."¹⁹

¹⁷ Care_savings_group_global_reach_report_20171.Pdf." n.d. Accessed November 14, 2018.

http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/care_savings_group_global_reach_report_20171.pdf.

¹⁸ "Opinion: A Decade after Massive Bank Bailouts, 'too Big to Fail' System Is Failing World's Poorest." 2018. Devex. November 1, 2018. <https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-a-decade-after-massive-bank-bailouts-too-big-to-fail-system-is-failing-world-s-poorest-93767>.

¹⁹ "Which Countries Score the Worst for Women's Rights? - HG.Org." n.d. Accessed November 14, 2018. <https://www.hg.org/legal-articles/which-countries-score-the-worst-for-women-s-rights-31265>.



Figure 8 Mahalaxmi, Nepal; Artist's Private Collection

Empowerment takes many forms and can include an infusion of monetary aid, housing, medical aid or education. No one individual contributes in all areas – each one of us has something that we can contribute individually; a strength, knowledge or personal interest. My personal knowledge is in textiles. I am fully immersed and knowledgeable about a myriad of aspects regarding the creation, production, and application of textiles. My artwork employs textile processes and I have taught dyeing, printing, weaving and garment making through my personal business as well as at universities. That knowledge and expertise facilitated production processes in Nepal while I also created new product to be made and marketed.

3.5 Activism

Stories end where the teller chooses the place in the journey for it to stop. But the journey continues. This thesis is the story of my journey that explored the dignity afforded those who transform their lives through making, and particularly the making of textiles. But my journey continues. Perhaps the next story is more active in engaging those possibilities.

“Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions.” Dalai Lama
XIV

In its simplest terms, activism is the process of enabling (x) to become (y). Activism is organized by individuals and/or organizations with the resources, willingness and empathy to champion those who are disadvantaged due to poverty, physical shortcomings, circumstances such as war or natural disasters or for simply being born female.

Activism is not charity. Through activism, programs are developed that aid people in oppressive conditions. There are many organizations that champion and support people including the Peace Corps, the Red Cross, CARE and many others. From disaster aid to education to financial aid and more, helping someone in need is not difficult and a small generosity of time, knowledge or money can make a big difference in someone's life.

When we are campaigning on behalf of people directly affected by poverty or human rights injustices, we must be mindful of the impact we can have, for good or ill. [...] pitying people is patronizing, stigmatizing injustices is judgmental, and neither are useful when trying to help. Instead, we should work with others in support and mutual respect. ‘We’ are not saving ‘them’ – we are all seeking liberation together.²⁰

²⁰ Sarah Corbett, *How to Be A Craftivist: The Art of Gentle Protest* (London: Unbound 2017), 48

3.6 Outcomes

Measuring human rights practices is the first step towards building theories to explain the causes and consequences of government respect for human rights. It is also necessary for the development and implementation of evidence-based policies. Both types of research are necessary steps in the effort to attain human dignity for all persons worldwide.²¹

There is strong evidence of the positive impact women's financial contributions make, most profoundly and especially to their children. Many of the children of mothers with skills, education and the advantages benefitted them through their earning potential go on to receive higher educations and enjoy improved standards of living.

Few producers want to leave ACP once they have joined, saying that the money, benefits and working agreements they receive helps improve their bargaining position for fairer wages and terms. In social development terms, primary producers and their children benefit from being part of the ACP enterprise.²²

Enabling change comes in many forms and those of us in a position to aid, if not doing so, should consider doing so in some capacity. But “we have to be careful not to victimize or demonize people or oversimplify issues.”²³ In the book *How to be a Craftivist: The Art of Gentle Protest*, Sarah Corbett states “It is always worth remembering to treat people how you would like to be treated – with dignity and respect – whether they are the oppressor or the oppressed.”²⁴

²¹ M. Rodwan Abouharb, and David L. Cingranelli, *Human Rights and Structural Adjustment*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9

²² Stephen Biggs and David Lewis. 2009. “Fair Trade and Organizational Innovation in Nepal: Lessons from 25 Years of Growth of the Association of Craft Producers (ACP)” *European Journal of Development Research* 21 (3): 377–96.

²³ Sarah Corbett, *How to Be A Craftivist: The Art of Gentle Protest* (London: Unbound 2017), 9

²⁴ Sarah Corbett, *How to Be A Craftivist: The Art of Gentle Protest* (London: Unbound 2017), 31

4 ARTWORKS

While working in Nepal in 2017, I finally became aware that my life's choices (whenever I had a choice), have been directed by a singular thread – my deep-seated impulse to help, uplift and empower. “It requires thoughtfulness to understand the context of the situation and empathy to help understand people's views and actions.”²⁵

Nepal is a beautiful country. Situated primarily in the Himalaya mountains, it is landlocked by India and Tibet. While in Nepal I stayed in the capital city, Kathmandu. Nepal suffered a massive earthquake in 2015 in the area in and around Kathmandu which claimed the lives of 9,000 people and injured 22,000. I witnessed efforts everywhere, from rebuilding homes for the many thousands displaced during the earthquake to building and recovering many existing and historical structures.

In 2015 Business Insider ranked Nepal 19 of 23 poorest countries in the world.²⁶ Poverty is conspicuous, from the crumbling buildings to the lack of infrastructure. One cannot miss or dismiss the sight of trash not only on the streets but for me most poignantly in and along the banks of the Bagmati River and its tributaries.

²⁵ Sarah Corbett, *How to Be A Craftivist: The Art of Gentle Protest* (London: Unbound 2017), 2

²⁶ Barbara Tasch, “The 23 poorest countries in the world”, Business Insider, Jul. 13, 2015
<https://www.businessinsider.com/the-23-poorest-countries-in-the-world-2015-7>

The Bagmati River is a sacred Hindu river and it not only serves to bless the Hindu followers, but it is also the main drinking and irrigation source for Kathmandu. I was profoundly struck by the sight of the trash in the river as it became a metaphor for the struggles impoverished people face. The condition of the trash in Kathmandu and the condition of women encumbered by poverty have parallels. It is an entrenched condition, culturally, economically and politically.



Figure 9 Burden, 2017

Using my imagery of the Bagmati River, *Burden* is a view of the trash on the bank of the river. The image is layered over a chiffon fabric embellished with gold thread. The layers of

fabric represent the weight and impact of the trash synonymous with poverty, but also maintaining the dignity of the river.

The emancipation of women affords positive outcomes for themselves and their families. Their strength and determination are illustrated in the works *Perseverance* and *Determination*. These women are depicted hard at work their representation stitched in gold thread over hand dyed fabric.



Figure 10 Perseverance, 2019



Figure 11 Determination, 2019

5 CONCLUSION

I am an activist textile artist who uses my art to build awareness of the power that textiles generate to change the lives of disadvantaged women. My creations draw directly from my experiences teaching and mentoring women locally and abroad.

Growing up in Africa and travelling internationally are the foundation of my perspective. Having experienced personal hardships of my own growing up in the 1960's and 1970's, hardships exacerbated by being female in a male dominated world, it was inevitable that my life's journey would eventually lead to a personal call to seek out and become involved with groups and organizations that empower disadvantaged women.

I am drawn to textiles both as my artistic medium as well as the subject of this thesis. Textiles provide a capacity to transform lives because they are readily available, and the skills needed to work with them are universal. Industrially produced, there is still a place for a cottage industry making it a highly effective mechanism for women to actively leverage this product to empower and advance themselves. My projects working directly with poor and disadvantaged women is highly fulfilling and these experiences have inspired and influenced my personal ambitions as well as my art practice. My MFA thesis exhibit entitled *Dignity* draws on these experiences paying homage to the power that women achieve when working with textiles. It focuses attention on the hand as a universal tool, independent of needed investment which serves to both support and empower women globally.

REFERENCES

- Abouharb, M. Rodwan, and David L. Cingranelli. 2007. *Human Rights and Structural Adjustment*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- “About – Welcome to the Ibu Movement”, Accessed April 15, 2019,
<https://ibumovement.com/pages/about-ibu>
- “ACP-Association for Craft Producers.” n.d. Accessed October 31, 2018a. <http://acp.org.np/>.
- Adamson, Glen. *Fewer Better Things: The Hidden Wisdom of Objects*. Bloomsbury 2018.
<https://www.glennadamson.com/fewer-better-things>
- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Article 5.
<http://www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/>
- Biggs, Stephen, and David Lewis. 2009a. “Fair Trade and Organizational Innovation in Nepal: Lessons from 25 Years of Growth of the Association of Craft Producers (ACP).” *European Journal of Development Research* 21 (3): 377–96. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2009.11>.
- Brené Brown on Empathy*, The RSA, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>
- “Care_savings_group_global_reach_report_20171.Pdf.” n.d. Accessed November 14, 2018.
http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/care_savings_group_global_reach_report_20171.pdf.
- Corbett, Sarah. “*How to be a Craftivist: The Art of Gentle Protest*” London: Unbound, 2017
- Farago, Alli “The Textile Industry During the Industrial Revolution”, October 2017
<https://globaledge.msu.edu/blog/post/54483/the-textile-industry-during-the-industrial-revolution>
- “GENEVA CONVENTION.” n.d. Accessed October 11, 2018.
http://archive.ppu.org.uk/learn/texts/doc_geneva_con.html.
- Goleman, Daniel, PhD. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, Bantam Books, 2005
- Hemmings, Jessica. 2015. *Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Kurtas, Susan. n.d. “*Research Guides: UN Documentation: Human Rights: Introduction.*” Research guide. Accessed October 11, 2018.
[//research.un.org/en/docs/humanrights/Introduction](https://research.un.org/en/docs/humanrights/Introduction).

Murray, Anne Firth. 2008. *From Outrage to Courage: Women Taking Action for Health and Justice*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, ©2008.

“Opinion: A Decade after Massive Bank Bailouts, ‘too Big to Fail’ System Is Failing World’s Poorest.” 2018. Devex. November 1, 2018.
<https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-a-decade-after-massive-bank-bailouts-too-big-to-fail-system-is-failing-world-s-poorest-93767>.

“Our History – Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco”, Accessed April 15, 2019,
<https://www.textilescusco.org/index.php/our-history/>

“Overview.Pdf.” n.d. Accessed October 11, 2018a.
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPOVERTY/Resources/WDR/overview.pdf>.

“PUBLIC LAW 100-377—AUG. 1, 1988 102 STAT. 883”, Accessed 04-15-2019
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-102/pdf/STATUTE-102-Pg883.pdf>

Tasch, Barbara “The 23 poorest countries in the world”, Business Insider, Jul. 13, 2015
<https://www.businessinsider.com/the-23-poorest-countries-in-the-world-2015-7>

“Tell Congress: Invest in Women Worldwide - CARE.” n.d. Accessed November 14, 2018a.
https://my.care.org/site/Advocacy;jsessionid=000000000.app338a?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=776&utm_medium=email&utm_source=care&utm_campaign=c4_fy19-2018_gender-empowerment&utm_content=wee-senate-introduction-alert&s_src=c4_FY19-2018_Gender-Empowerment&s_subsrc=wee-senate-introduction-alert&autologin=true&NONCE_TOKEN=221FD27678A87CBB34DC7D1B78DB5D25.

“Which Countries Score the Worst for Women’s Rights? - HG.Org.” n.d. Accessed November 14, 2018. <https://www.hg.org/legal-articles/which-countries-score-the-worst-for-women-s-rights-31265>.

“WHO | Constitution of WHO: Principles.” n.d. Accessed November 26, 2018.
<https://www.who.int/about/mission/en/>